SECTION III

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISIONS

I approached my decisions by first looking at the major issues and public comment on those issues and then comparing the various alternative's response to the issues. My rationale for these decisions is built upon this comparison and is presented below.

During the period between the Draft and Final EIS, Malheur National Forest employees held numerous meetings with interested publics Initially Forest employees met with the interested citizens to hear their concerns and clarify issues Next, Forest employees looked at ways to address these comments, developed proposals for the major issues and shared them with the citizens These citizens responded to the proposals, and their responses were used to develop the recommendations to me.

In arriving at this decision, I reviewed the environmental consequences of the Forest Plan and the alternatives. I gave particular attention to how the alternatives respond to the public issues and management concerns In my judgement, the selected alternative promotes the highest level of land stewardship in striving for healthy forest and range ecosystems, while producing both monetary and nonmonetary resource outputs

RATIONALE FOR RESOLVING EACH ISSUE

The response of each alternative to the major issues, which were grouped based on common elements and similarities into six different issue areas, was a primary consideration in choosing the selected alternative. The alternatives and their resolution of the issues are discussed below, and are disclosed in greater detail in the FEIS, CHAPTERS I and V

ISSUE AREA : Riparian Areas

- What effect will forest management activities have on riparian areas, what level of fisheries habitat productivity should be maintained, what level of timber harvest is compatible with riparian-dependent resources?

  Although they occupy only a small portion of the Forest's land base, riparian areas are the most productive and biologically diverse areas on the Forest. These areas provide important fish and wildlife habitat and often contain very productive timber stands and productive, lush forage in grazing allotments. Their gentle topography makes riparian areas attractive for road location and, in the semiarid west, the combination of water and riparian vegetation attracts recreationists. Because of the variety and sometimes conflicting nature of these concentrated uses, riparian areas have the greatest potential for resource-use conflict on the Forest

  Public response to the draft documents included many comments that were critical of our riparian area management, especially about the effects of livestock grazing. I believe many of these criticisms have merit and that changes in management standards are necessary. For this reason new grazing utilization standards were developed in 1988 and have been adopted in this Forest Plan In general, these standards will have the effect of reducing the level of forage utilization by livestock in riparian areas. This will be helpful in our efforts to restore and maintain stream shade and streambank stability

  During the past couple of years, Forests and Regional Offices in Regions 1, 4, and 6 have been working closely with Columbia Basin Indian tribes and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) on the issue of anadromous fish habitat management At this time, a Forest Service draft policy and policy implementation guide have been developed, and are expected to be approved in the

near future. Upon approval of the policy and implementation guide, the Forest Plan will be reviewed and amended if necessary. This will be completed as soon as it is possible to do so. I believe this policy will be an important factor in helping to achieve a mutual goal of the Tribes and the Forest Service to provide strategies for habitat management and anadromous fish production consistent with fish restoration goals of the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. I will make it a point that the CRITFC be contacted early in the scoping phase of analysis for any projects located in anadromous fish drainages on the Forest.

Alternative I permitted scheduled timber harvest inside the riparian area for Class I and II nonanadromous streams, but not anadromous streams I have modified this alternative to exclude from scheduled harvest, a strip of land 100 feet on each side of **all** Class I and II streams. I have several reasons for taking this approach:

1. These areas are critical in the protection of water quality and fish habitat. Management activities, such as timber harvest, present much greater risk to water quality and fish habitat if they occur close to these important streams.

2. Some streams on the Forest have been damaged by past activities, including timber harvest, road construction, mining, and livestock grazing.

3. Trees within riparian areas provide shade and streambank stability while they are alive. When they die, they provide habitat for snag-dependent species and later, those which fall into or across the stream, provide channel stability and improved fish habitat Quality of these habitats will be greatest if these areas are excluded from scheduled harvest

This does not mean that no harvest can occur in riparian areas. As with all lands outside the suitable base, harvest is allowed "when necessary to accomplish multiple use objectives other than timber" (FOREST PLAN, FOREST-WIDE STANDARD #103 and MANAGEMENT AREAS 3a and 3b #25). This means that in riparian areas non-scheduled harvest is allowed if doing so will accomplish specific riparian resource objectives.

In making this decision I have considered the economic consequences of removing these areas from scheduled harvest Analysis indicates that removing these lands (approximately 5,000 acres) from the suitable base results in a drop in the annual ASQ of approximately 0.2 MMCF (1 MMBF). I believe that this trade-off is worth the benefits received from the added stream protection. This change is reflected in the Forest Plan standards but not in the outputs such as those identified in the schedule of management activities or the land allocation adjustment to unsuitable timber lands.

ISSUE AREA : Big-game Habitat

- What level of big-game habitat should be provided to meet the needs for desirable big-game herds?

Elk populations prior to 1970 were relatively stable but low During the past decade populations have steadily increased to a current summer population of about 6,600 elk; about one-third of these elk winter on the Forest Mule deer population have fluctuated during the past 40 years and are currently on a downward trend in 2 of the 7 game management units which include the Forest. Management of winter range for elk will provide for the wintering needs of mule deer as well since mule deer winter range on the Forest is minimal and overlaps with elk winter range. Mule deer winter ranges occur principally on private lands below the Forest.